

Eggplant



Like its cousin the tomato, eggplant is actually a fruit, not a vegetable. What is the link to eggs? Unlike today's purple pear-shaped types, early eggplants were white and egg shaped. Specialty markets often carry white; purple-and-white-striped; thin Japanese; and small Italian eggplant varieties. Eggplant is available year-round with the peak harvest from late summer to mid-autumn.

Meaty in texture, eggplant is often used in sandwiches and casseroles in place of meat. It's also delicious in stews, pasta sauces and dips.

Preparing

- Rinse eggplants under cold water just before using. Trim off and discard the stem ends and caps.
- The skins of small young eggplants are edible and do not need peeling. The tough skins of older eggplants and white eggplants should be peeled with a vegetable peeler or paring knife. Peel just before using as the flesh discolors quickly.
- Cut eggplant into crosswise or lengthwise slices with a chef's knife. The slices can then be cut into cubes, if desired.
- Eggplant is often salted and drained before cooking to remove bitterness and release moisture so less oil is absorbed during cooking. Small young eggplants usually do not require salting. To salt eggplant, cut as directed. Place in a colander and sprinkle evenly with salt. Let stand 30 minutes to drain. Rinse and pat dry with paper towels.
- Roasting, sautéing, baking, frying, steaming, microwaving and broiling are all acceptable cooking methods. Since eggplant absorbs oil like a sponge during cooking, slices are often dipped in a flour, egg and bread crumb coating before frying.

Purchasing

- Select firm eggplants that feel heavy for their size and have smooth glossy skins. The stems and caps should be fresh and green, not brown. (Japanese eggplants have purple stems and caps.)
- Eggplants bruise easily. Avoid any with soft spots or shriveled blemished skins.
- Select small to medium eggplants rather than large ones. They usually contain fewer seeds and have a sweeter, less bitter, flavor.
- Refrigerate unwashed eggplants in a plastic bag for up to 5 days. Since they become more bitter with age, use as soon as possible after purchasing for the best flavor.

Serving Ideas

- Brush eggplant slices with oil or vinaigrette and grill with other vegetables for a delicious side dish.
- Tuck cooked eggplant slices into your favorite sandwich filling
- Add peeled chopped eggplant to the vegetables in your favorite chili recipe.
- Prepare delicious classic eggplant dishes, such as eggplant Parmesan, ratatouille, caponata and moussaka.
- Toss chopped eggplant into your favorite stir-fry as it blends well with the flavors of garlic and sesame oil.
- Stir roasted eggplant chunks into marinara sauce before tossing with pasta.

Recipes

Eggplant Parmesan

- 1 eggplant, sliced
- 1/2 lb. sliced fresh mushrooms
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan Cheese
- 1-1/2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 jar (26 oz) spaghetti sauce

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Spray 13x9-inch baking pan. Place half each of the eggplant and mushrooms in prepared pan; top with layers of one-third each of both of the cheeses. Repeat all layers. Top evenly with foil. Bake 35 minutes. Remove foil. Sprinkle with remaining cheeses. Bake, uncovered, an additional 5 minutes or until mozzarella cheese is melted.

Harvest Ratatouille

- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 tbsp oil
- 1 medium unpeeled eggplant, cubed
- 1 medium zucchini, cubed
- 1/2 medium red pepper, chopped
- 1/2 medium yellow or green pepper, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 28-oz can whole tomatoes, drained, cut up
- 1/4 cup Sun-Dried Tomato Salad dressing
- 1/4 tsp dried thyme leaves
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 2 tbsp grated Parmesan Cheese

Cook onion in hot oil in large skillet on medium heat 10 minutes or until lightly browned, stirring occasionally. Add eggplant; cook and stir 5 minutes. Add zucchini, peppers, and garlic; cook and stir 5 minutes. Add tomatoes, dressing, thyme, and salt; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low; cover. Simmer 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender, stirring occasionally. Serve topped with Parmesan cheese.

Pepper, Mushroom, and Eggplant Salad

- 1 green pepper
 - 1 red pepper
 - 1 yellow pepper
 - 8 oz. Portobello mushroom caps
 - 6 eggplant slices (1/4-inch thick)
 - 1 cup Balsamic Vinaigrette Dressing, divided
- Cut peppers lengthwise into quarters. Place vegetables on rack of broiler pan 2 to 3 inches from heat. Brush

- vegetables with 3/4 cup dressing. Broil 6 to 8
- dressing. Broil 6 to 8 minutes or until
- tender, turning and brushing occasionally
- with remaining dressing. Slice mushrooms;
- toss with peppers, eggplant and remaining
- 1/4 cup dressing.

Freezing

- Harvest uniformly dark color eggplant
- before seeds become mature.
- For casseroles: Wash, peel, and slice 1/3
- inch thick. Prepare just enough eggplant for
- 1 blanching at a time. Blanch 4 minutes in 1
- gallon boiling water containing 1/2 cup
- lemon juice. Cool. Drain. Pack in can-or-
- freeze jars or plastic freezer boxes. Seal,
- label and freeze.
- For Frying Pack same as for casseroles,
- except separate drained slices with freezer
- wrap.

Nutrition

- Low in calories
- Sodium free



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